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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 197 (2015) 1246 – 1249

**Procedia**  
Social and Behavioral Sciences

7th World Conference on Educational Sciences, (WCES-2015), 05-07 February 2015, Novotel  
Athens Convention Center, Athens, Greece

## Informing strategies: building the communication framework

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### Abstract

The importance of the new communication means in the teaching process is a familiar, much discussed and tested topic. The aim of the present paper is to highlight the fact that an informational content is much easier understood if the proper communication framework is built. The communication framework takes into account both the verbal and the visual message. The new technical devices give us the possibility to tell a 'story' which encloses the informational content. Such a strategy assures and supports the understanding and memorising process. The teaching method put forward in the present paper is checked through an experiment done with our students.

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Peer-review under responsibility of Academic World Education and Research Center.

**Keywords:** communication framework, content, framing, visual message, strategy

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### 1. Introduction

The major changes that the emergence of new communication technologies produce in our social lives and in the professional activity sectors generated various reactions to these new means of communication: some see them as beneficial, contributing to an effective communication, others perceive them as coercive, due to the damage they generate to imagination and creativity. We consider as relevant the "realistic" perspective according to which virtuality is understood as an inherent part of the individual, collective and institutional actions, rather than a phenomenon that takes place outside the individual's life (Beciu, 2011: 160). Technology must be seen in terms of

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its utility and it becomes meaningful only as a man's tool used to perform certain acts and to facilitate communication (Bougnoux, 2000; Duarte, 2010).

### *1.1. General framework*

From this perspective we approach the new communication technologies in education. The present study intends to demonstrate the large possibilities offered by the virtual environment for the presentation of information in the form of "stories", a presentation designed to resonate with the receiver. We support the idea that "stories" can be created and / or transmitted through this medium that is able to act on the receiver's psycho-affective system by generating an emotional appeal. The receiver's cognitive system is then involved and we refer here to the ability to identify the elements that make up a story, the ability to decode the meaning of each of these elements and of the overall message. The purpose is none other than engaging, transforming, and activating the audience, so that the whole process should lead to a better understanding and memorization of the information content.

### *1.2. Identifying the problem*

In one of the seminars on the topic of influence, we explained the students the mechanism through which influence is produced in the sense advanced by Alex Mucchielli (2002). In general, his theory is based on the idea that communication acts upon the context (on the seven contextual components of the situation or only on some of them) and alters it, thus changing the conveyed message. For example, we exposed the students to a communication situation, known as the case of the blind man on Brooklyn Bridge, in the form of a written text. After applying Mucchielli's theory on three communication situations (which were presented traditionally, as a written text), we gave the students an assessment test. The result was that out of 28 students, only 6 students had understood the mechanism and were able to apply it to a communication situation.

For greater accuracy of the discussion, we present the communication situation known as the 'case of the blind beggar on Brooklyn's bridge':

A blind man was begging on the Brooklyn bridge on a spring morning. On his knees, there was a piece of cardboard where the following words were written: "I am blind by birth". Passers-by walked indifferently past him. A stranger stopped. He took the cardboard, turned it, scribbled a few words on it and went away. Immediately thereafter, the miracle! Each passer-by turned his or her head and many of them, soft-hearted, stopped and threw a penny in the box. The few words had been enough. They said simply "It is spring and I can't see it." (Mucchielli, 2002: 37)

## **2. The experiment**

### *2.1. The experiment*

Shortly after the above mentioned seminar, a video was released on the Internet transposing the story of the blind man on the Brooklyn Bridge. We thought that it would be interesting to see how theory was perceived and understood by the students if they were exposed both to the video and to the written text. Thus, in the first stage, we provided students with a text describing the communication situation, and then we explained to them how to apply Mucchielli's theory to that particular situation. In the second stage, the students watched of the film which was then discussed and interpreted. Without granting students any respite to enhance their knowledge through the practice of applying the method to other similar communication situations, we gave the assessment test. Surprisingly, the number of students who understood and were able to apply the theory to another case was higher (14 out of 25 students).

## 2.2. The analysis

The analytical interpretation of the communication situation presented as a written text raised some objections from students. One of them referred to the general perception of society regarding the condition of persons with disabilities, and another to the perception of the beggar as a negative element. When transmitting the idea taken from Mucchielli and relating it to questioning the veracity of the disability of a person who begs, a doubt that is regarded as a constant in the mind of society, there were voices (only about 2 or 3, indeed) who denied the generality of perception. By watching the video, this aspect was elucidated. In addition to the text, the film presented two sequences where the blind beggar was touching the shoes of a passer-by. He was making use of his sense of touch, a substitute for his sight, in order to know and recognize the person who brought the change in the attitude of the bystanders. Moreover, the touching was reiterated to the interlocutor: the passer-by touched the blind man in her turn, which suggests closeness; hence, a relationship was established between the protagonists, which was absent in the text. The effect of the semantic contribution, actualised by the relationship established between the beggar and the passer-by, is indisputable in raising the receiver's awareness (in this case, the students). The effect is amplified by replacing the male passer-by from Mucchielli's text with a woman; consequently, the difference of gender (male - female) brings additional semantic valence. Thence, the video clarifies and enriches the semantics of the message imprinting the affective-emotional orientation in the processing of information.

An important element highlighted by the students after watching the film, is that the text on the blind beggar's piece of cardboard (*It's a beautiful day and I can't see it.*) contains the verb *can't* which is written in boldface letters. Of course, this element, which is brought to the attention of the receiver through the channel, is absent in the written text. The thick, heavy lines of the letters are meant not only to focus the receiver's attention on the information relative to the state of things and to the condition of the protagonist, but also to facilitate accession to the implicit relations of the discourse. I can't (see the spring), *but I wish I could see it the same way as you do; I wish I could overcome my condition.* Thus, students understood the positive significance of the by-passers' gesture of giving money to the blind beggar much easier than when they were confronted with the written text only. They were able to identify the purpose of communication more quickly when they saw the video. Catching the receivers' attention using the media proved essential in establishing the implicit relations in the discourse.

Perhaps the decisive factor in changing the receiver's perception and in deciphering the meaning is the fact that the passer-by who alters the beggar's text on the cardboard is wearing sunglasses with dark lenses, which are specific to blind people. The key element of the film scenario, which the written text lacks, is suggestive in creating an empathic relationship with the receiver. Considered one of the skills necessary to achieve competent communication (Floyd, 2013: 48-49; 249), empathy helps the receiver to identify himself/herself with what it is transmitted. The fact that the passer-by is wearing dark sunglasses expresses the abolition of certain identity barriers such as "I am I and you are you"; she may be the blind beggar and he may be any other person without the respective disability, mainly so because he wears no special glasses. Breaking barriers and reversing roles lead the receiver to easily uncover implicit discourse relations as mentioned above: *I can't see it (the spring), but I wish I could, I wish I were like you.*

The slow melody of the music track, showing sensitivity, the predominance in the video of grey colours, lacking brightness, and the vivacity help to create a specific atmosphere and thus to suggest the receiver a particular mood.

## 3. Conclusion

Following the experiments, we could distinguish 3 stages:

1. A stage where the structural elements of the video are identified, by means of which the dramatization of the situation is achieved. Here, the following issues are referential:
  - Creating a relationship between the protagonists by appealing to nonverbal elements (touching);
  - Creating the reversed contrast (dark lens glasses are specific to the blind are worn by the passer-by and not by the person with disability);
  - The action sequencing and the progress towards accomplishment.
2. A stage of decoding the meanings of these elements;

### 3. A stage of channeling the ideas into a certain direction / aim.

It is important to note that, in their analysis, the students have spotted differences and similarities between the film and the text, the reference to the latter involving a comparative approach. The dramatization of the communication situation in the form of a video, taking into account the association of the verbal with the auditory, the visual and the moving force, is meant to highlight the contrast between “what it is” and “what it could be”. This helps the receivers understand the meaning of the message. Staging certain elements that constitute the description of the communication situation under a multidimensional aspect points to their interrelation and thus facilitates the creation of a “story”. If in the traditional text the information is static, in the video, by the interposition of modern communication media, the presentation of the information content becomes more dynamic, it acquires shape, colour, sound and movement, in a word, visibility. In conclusion, we consider that the experiment proves the importance of the new communication technologies in conceiving and transmitting the information in the form of a “story”, in perceiving, understanding and thus in memorizing the message.

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